

Land Use / Community Form

Any overview of SoBro's land use and community form would not be complete without an understanding of its historical context. A brief visit today through the area south of Broadway will display glimpses of yesteryear's fabric, particularly as one travels down Fourth or Sixth Streets. Yet, in between, parking lots and underutilized properties dot this urban neighborhood where a thriving mixed-use district once existed. Not one factor has created such a shift over the last century, but rather a myriad of influences including changes in technologies, transportation patterns, regulatory means, and investment strategies amongst others. What is left for the 21st Century is an area complete with investment opportunities, particularly with its unique location between the reinvigorated downtown and the historic neighborhoods of Old Louisville and Limerick.

The following chapter discusses the historic and current factors that define SoBro's land use and community form. Many of the ideas generated in the plan process and reflected in the recommendations arose from the Task Force's efforts for envisioning and thinking creatively of how to revitalize SoBro into a thriving mixed-use neighborhood. The consultant and Louisville Metro Planning and Design Services used a workshop to help produce a significant amount of ideas that serve for the basis of this plan's recommendations. Many of these forward-thinking ideas are reflected in this chapter, with the synthesis of the workshop included in the Appendix. The Task Force recognized that SoBro was not one unified form or land use district. By dividing the neighborhood into three sections for analysis, the stakeholders were able to recognize that the study area presents a mix of block types, forms, and uses, yet should serve to tie the urban fabric together in a manner that develops a sense of place for encouraging investment and redevelopment in SoBro for the future.

Form Districts and Community Character

Located in an area that was one of Louisville's original neighborhoods, SoBro once possessed the character typical of a traditional neighborhood. Archived photos remind us of the once prevalent residential fabric, intertwined with an array of uses, all in close proximity of one another. Following years of technological, economic, and socio-cultural shifts, the character of SoBro has dramatically changed. Form district regulations serve today as the key regulation that determines the ongoing character of Louisville's neighborhoods and can serve as a key tool to restore some of the urban fabric previously in the SoBro area.



"Strategically located between downtown and the Old Louisville and Limerick neighborhoods, SoBro has been called the "missing link" because of its fragmented development pattern and large amount of underused land. Because of its location, SoBro has the potential to help create a continuous attractive urban environment from the Ohio River south to the University of Louisville."

**Louisville Downtown
Development Plan, 2002**



SoBro's urban form and character consists of a unique variety of faces including traditional neighborhood and traditional workplace.

The neighborhood study area includes three form districts, each complementary of the traditional and historic fabric of diverse uses and their built environment. These include Downtown (DFD), Traditional Workplace (TWFD), and Traditional Neighborhood (TNFD). The northern section, the area generally north of York Street, is currently designated Downtown Form District. The DFD is intended to create a downtown with a compact, walkable core and a lively and active pedestrian environment that fosters and increases the number of people walking and to ensure a more humane downtown environment. DFD design standards are also intended to promote the downtown as a unique and active destination with a variety of land uses, including residential uses, designed in context within the area in which they are located. Buildings such as the Weissinger/Gaulbert Building and the Heyburn Building provide a variety of uses and the inviting street-level characteristics that the DFD is intended to address.

At the core of the Sobro area is the Traditional Neighborhood form district (See map on page 25). The TNFD is intended to promote the establishment of a mixture of uses that effectively integrate retail, office, institutional, and other non-residential uses within traditional neighborhoods in a manner that provides high quality and convenient service to residents while protecting the character of the neighborhood. Currently, only a brief section of the 900 block of South Sixth Street with late 19th Century masonry homes provides a glimpse of the traditional urban fabric once prevalent throughout the area of Sobro. The adjacent traditional neighborhoods, Limerick and Old Louisville, exemplify Sobro's historic context. Structures such as "The Olympia" at the corner of 3rd Street and Breckinridge serve as a good example of corner mixed use within a Traditional Neighborhood.

Finally, the 9th Street corridor (including 7th and 8th Streets) area along Sobro's western edge, is a critical area for the neighborhood's future viability. It is located adjacent to the Station Park/Park Hill area, Louisville's 19th century industrial hot zone and key economic engine of that time. As such, the dominant land use is industrial, intermingling with some residential properties. This area is designated under Louisville Metro's form districts as Traditional Workplace (TWFD). TWFD applies to older established industrial and employment areas that contain primarily small-to-medium scale industrial and employment uses. These uses are often historically integrated with or adjacent to residential neighborhoods, especially traditional neighborhoods. District standards are designed to encourage adaptive reuse and investment in these areas while ensuring compatibility with adjacent uses and form districts, to ensure adequate access and transit service, and to retain



Historic streetscape and vista of Downtown skyline.



"The Olympia" building on the corner of 3rd and Breckinridge exemplifies corner mixed-use.

distinctive land uses and patterns such as connected street grids. The current pattern of investment in Sobro's 9th Street area, particularly medium intensity industrial uses, reflects the essence of the TWFD, despite pockets of vacant parcels and buildings in need of reinvestment. Nevertheless, following the guidelines of the TWFD, opportunities for adaptive reuse of structures such as light industrial and live-work units exists and should be encouraged as long as the uses are compatible with nearby residential areas.

Future Form Districts and Community Character

The stakeholders involved in Sobro's neighborhood planning process recognize that the neighborhood's future success depends on exploiting its existing assets, including the current "commingling of business, education, cultural institutions, commerce and manufacturing, all set within the context of a vibrant and diverse residential district." Form district standards are used to guide this blend, yet must work within the realities of market and property rights forces. One recommendation to achieve this mix as well as the desired outcomes of the future built environment is extending the boundaries of the existing Downtown Form District south from York Street to Kentucky, from 1-65 to Seventh Street; and then from Broadway to Cawthon between Seventh and Ninth Streets. This area's designation as DFD would serve as a catalyst for expanding the Downtown Development Corporation's (DDC) jurisdiction as part of the Downtown Development Review Overlay District (DDRO). SoBro's inclusion in these regulatory tools further strengthens the goals outlined for SoBro in the Downtown Development Plan and echoed in Cornerstone 2020.

Due to the complexity of ownership in this district, any future infill or redevelopment in this area will be incremental. However, the oversight and enabling capabilities of the Downtown Development Corporation and the DDRO process would aim to maintain a coherent form and pattern of mixed-use investment. The Task Force and participating stakeholders from the study considers the DFD designation as the most supportive and enabling of the urban scale and form, implicit in the SoBro vision. In addition, since detached single-family residential in the DFD would still adhere to TNFD standards, the integrity of the existing traditional residential structures in Limerick/Old Louisville would not be compromised.

The "southwest" portion has always had an industrial tinge to its urban fabric and may continue to serve in this capacity for the foreseeable future, albeit at a much smaller scale than



Aerial image depicting the abundance of surface parking



known in past generations. New flexible technologies in manufacturing favor smaller, decentralized production units, often providing specializing services to nearby larger producers or as providers of products for consumer niche markets. The Traditional Workplace Form District serves to accommodate this type of production, yet provides opportunities for the integration of housing and retail. This plan does not recommend changes to the existing TWFD of the study area. However, any future development to this part of SoBro, particularly those commercial or industrial uses, should use creative and flexible site design that protects the nearby residential neighborhoods from incompatible uses and nuisances. The use of creative landscaping for screening and buffering, such as fencing (see pictures in right column on page 23) and the provision of common streetscape elements, such as street trees, signage, street furniture, sidewalks and lighting in a fashion that integrates the area with its adjacent historic neighborhood, Old Louisville.

Current Land Use and Zoning

An understanding of today's land use and current zoning districts within Sobro would not be complete without an analysis of the original zoning in the Sobro area. Beginning in 1931, the year the City of Louisville first adopted zoning district maps, the Sobro area was blanketed with the equivalent of M-2 and M-3 designations. Prior to this designation, the area south of Broadway thrived as a fully developed neighborhood from 1st through 9th streets. As described earlier in the "Sobro History" section, the area saw its heyday during a time prior to any type of zoning regulations. Once the area became industrially zoned, over time the attractiveness as a residential area shifted to the commercial and tenement district described previously.

Today's Sobro represents a full evolution of that change from residential to a complete mix of zoning classes, with no one district being dominant. Table 1 breaks down Sobro's zoning category percentages by class (See Map for locations). The most dominant class is C-2, which is a medium intensity commercial district that is intended to allow a variety of uses including retail, offices, restaurants, and residential. The bulk of the 6th and York Street area, as well as the Breckinridge and 2nd Street area are within the C-2 district. The next highest zoning district is R-7, which is intended to provide for medium density multi-family development, but allows for single family, row houses and multiple family units.

One of the most visible sections of Sobro, the 4th Street corridor, is zoned OR-3, which is intended to allow a greater mix and intensity of office and residential uses. The important

<i>SoBro Zoning Categories</i>	<i>Number of Parcels</i>	<i>Percent of Total</i>
C2	370	38.5%
R7	154	16.0%
M2	135	14.0%
CM	76	7.9%
OR3	66	6.9%
C3	65	6.8%
M1	27	2.8%
M3	17	1.8%
OTF	16	1.7%
OR2	15	1.6%
C1	11	1.1%
EZ1	7	0.7%
UN	2	0.2%
	961	100.0%



distinction for the OR-3 district is the restriction of commercial uses to incidental use, such as a pharmacy inside of a nursing home, or restaurant inside a student center.

Industrial uses are permitted in a majority of the western section of Sobro, which includes a mix of M2, CM, M1, M3, and EZ-1. These uses allow for manufacturing, processing, treatment and storage of various products. The most prominent industrial district for Sobro is M2, which is a medium intensity district that is commonly used for outdoor storage among other uses.

Future Land Use and Zoning

Among the most important dialogues during the planning process related to the future land uses and the question of whether these zoning districts would lead to eventual realization of the Sobro Vision Statement to create a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood. The plan proposes establishing Planned Development Districts (PDD) as a means to achieve this vision. Two contiguous districts South of Broadway – the main body of SoBro between Ninth and I-65 north of Kentucky, and the so-called SoBro “dogleg,” in the southwest of the study area along Ninth Street south to Ormsby would be the PDDs.

In each case, rezoning the affected district will increase certainty for property owners and prospective developers about the design standards and the mix of forms and uses considered acceptable and mutually compatible within the district. The purpose of establishing each district is to impose a clearly articulated plan for the affected area produced through a process of community dialogue, negotiation and agreement. Louisville Metro Planning and Design Services (LMPDS) will facilitate the process for developing the plan and standards upon which each Planned Development District will be based.

The purpose for recommending two distinct Planned Development Districts represents the unique attributes of each district. The Planned Development District governing the main body of SoBro will likely aim toward creating the kind of mixed residential and commercial district described in the Task Force’s vision statement. Meanwhile, southwest SoBro will likely continue as a mixed industrial and commercial area with a distinct residential component.

While the PDD approach – specifically tailored for mixed-use areas – seems highly appro-

appropriate for both areas of SoBro, the distinctions between the two districts seem significant enough to warrant the establishment of two separate PDDs, each based in a distinct vision and scheme. The PDDs would need to be developed under the Master Plan Option, which requires detailed design guidelines, a detailed permitted use table for that PDD, and maps that detail the location of the permitted uses and their transition areas. Uses that have been expressed by the stakeholders involved in the plan process include general retail, multi-family residential, institutional uses, light industrial, office and service uses that compliment the surrounding residential and mixed use character. The existing industrial properties would not be adversely impacted, but rather would allow them to remain and have flexibility for potential future redevelopment.

Achieving the Master Plan Option recommended in this study would require amending the existing PDD ordinance. Specific changes would allow a Master Plan to delineate the transitions between uses and their intensity (i.e. height, density, etc.) within and between the differing form districts. For example, even though an area may allow similar uses (i.e. light industry and general retail), the development's intensity would be different based on its surrounding structures.

Summary Recommendations

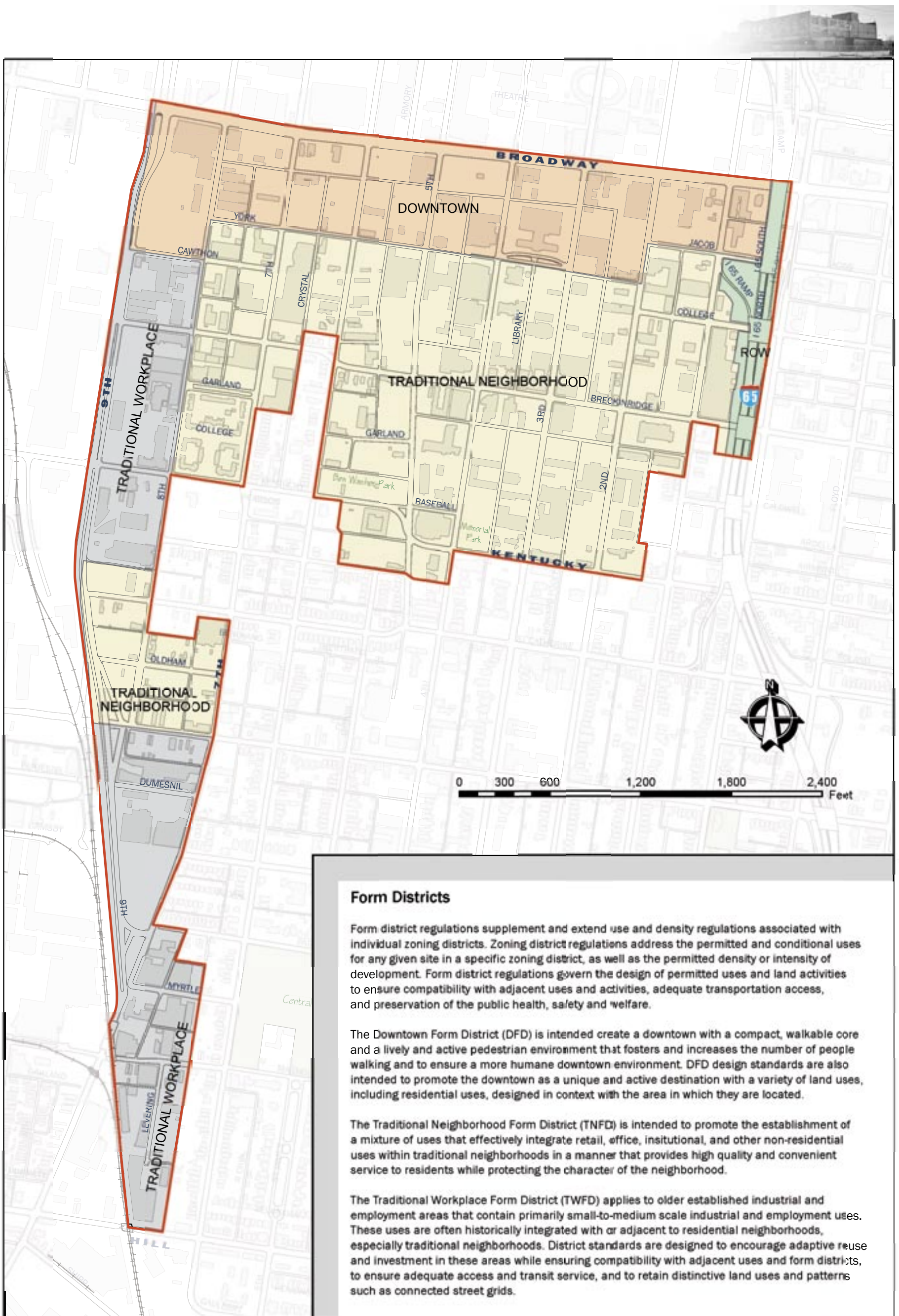
- Extend Downtown Form District south to Kentucky, east to I-65, west to 9th @ Cawthorn.
- Establish Planned Development District (PDD) south of Broadway within newly extended Downtown Form District.
- Establish Planned Development District (PDD) within SoBro “southwest” as mixed residential/commercial/light industrial district.
- Amend the existing Planned Development District ordinance to allow the master plan option to create an area-specific use table, a specific master plan map that delineates gradations in intensity to promote compatibility, and allowances for specific transition standards.
- In conjunction with recommended expansion of Downtown Form District, consider extending jurisdiction of Downtown Development Review Overlay District (DDRO) into SoBro.



The pictures above provide examples of preferred methods for landscaped screening for industrial properties in the TWFD, particularly those in close proximity to residential areas.



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- Organize Fourth Street institutions to investigate the feasibility of joint parking arrangements and facilities.
 - Establish a single entity dedicated to SoBro planning, advocacy, development, and area improvement.
 - Organize SoBro stakeholders around cooperative parking solutions, open space and streetscape master plans, the planning of joint recreational/athletic facilities, and development strategies.



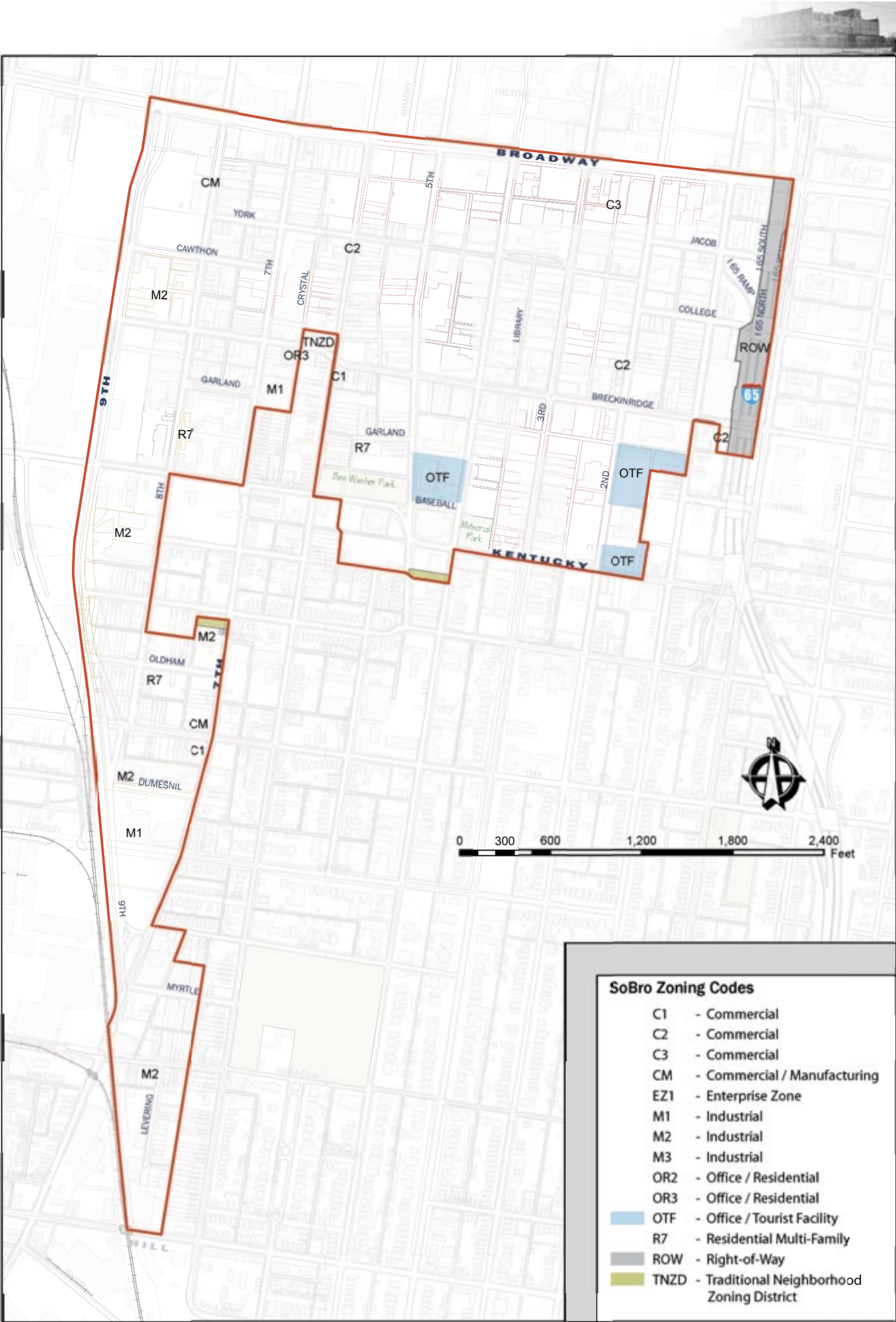
SoBro: Current Form Districts





SoBro: Current Land Use





SoBro: Current Zoning

